

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 AID-05 MCT-01 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6413
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USCINCSO
DIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 5881

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, SHUM, ES
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DISCUSSION WITH PRESIDENT ROMERO

REF: SAN SALVADOR 5545

1. ONE-HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ROMERO ON
DECEMBER 20 PROVIDED OCCASION INTER ALIA FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS DISCUSSION PROPOSED IN SAN SALVADOR 5545.
I SPECIFICALLY COVERED POINTS A AND B IN PARA 2 REFTEL.
PRESIDENT'S REACTION IS WORTH REPORTING.

2. WHEN I WARNED OF DANGER OF US-SALVADORAN RELATIONS
IN ANY OVERRREACTION BY ARMED FORCES OR SECURITY SERVICES
TO NEWLY PERCEIVED THREATS TO PUBLIC ORDER, THE
PRESIDENT INTERRUPTED ME TO SAY THAT HE HAD BEEN DOING
EVERYTHING HUMANLY POSSIBLE TO INSURE THAT SECURITY
MATTERS WERE HANDLED WITH PRUDENCE, MODERATION, AND
RESTRAINT. IN RECENT ARREST CASES, HE AHD INSISTED
THAT THERE BE NO PROLONGED DETENTIONS, THAT DETAINEES
BE INFORMED OF THEIR RIGHTS, INTERROGATED, AND PROMPTLY
REMANDED TO THE COURTS. HE POINTED OUT THAT WEEKEND
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EVICITION OF SQUATTERS FROM PRIVATELY OWNED FARM LANDS
(SAN SALVADOR 5838) HAD BEEN CARRIED OUT WITHOUT
INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THIS CONTINUES
TO BE HIS POLICY, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS COST HIM SUPPORT
IN CERTAIN SECTORS.

3. WARMING TO HIS SUBJECT, PRESIDENT ROMERO SAID THAT

POLICE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE ARE NOW UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO PROTECT PEASANTS AGAINST LANDOWNERS WHO SEEK TO SHORTCHANGE THEM THROUGH PAYMENT OF LESS THAN MINIMUM WAGE OR UNDERWEIGHING OF PRODUCT RECEIVED. HE SAID SOME LANDOWNERS HAD ALREADY BEEN BROUGHT IN AND CHARGED WITH SUCH PRACTICES.

4. PRESIDENT ROMERO THEN HANDED ME THE TEXT OF THE NEW LAND TAX LAW SUBMITTED THIS WEEK TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY. HE DESCRIBED THIS AS A STEP TOWARD AGRARIAN REFORM THROUGH STIMULATION OF IMPROVED USE OF LAND, EVENTUAL PROVISION OF SOME LANDS FOR TRANSFER, AND DEVELOPMENT OF TAX REVENUES SPECIFICALLY EARMARKED TO BENEFIT THE PEASANT CLASS. THE LAW HAD BEEN SUBMITTED IN DRAFT TO THE BUSINESS SECTOR FOR ITS COMMENT, AND BEEN NEGOTIATED BACK AND FORTH, AND HAD NOW BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN A FORM WHICH COULD BE SUPPORTED BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR. O MY QUESTION, THE PRESIDENT CONFIRMED THAT THE LAND TAX MEASURE WOULD NOT BE OPPOSED BY THE NATIONAL PRIVATE ENTERPRISE ASSOCIATION (ANEP).

5. AS OUR CONVERSATION DREW TO A CLOSE, I BROUGHT UP THE SUBJECT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. THE VISITING GROUP FROM THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, I SAID, WOULD BE SURE TO RAISE THIS MATTER. (PRESIDENT CONFIDENTIAL

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ROMERO INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT EIGHT PERSONS FROM THE IAHRG, THREE MEMBERS AND FIVE STAFF, WOULD BE HERE JANUARY 9-18.) I WENT ON TO OBSERVE THAT FRIENDS, RELATIVES, PARENTS, CHURCH SOURCES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ALL ALLEGE THAT THERE ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN EL SALVADOR. IT WAS INEVITABLE, I SUGGESTED, THAT THE IAHRG GROUP WOULD BE AWARE OF THESE ALLEGATIONS AND WISH TO DETERMINE THE FACTS. I SAID THAT I, PERSONALLY, HAD NO KNOWLEDGE AS TO WHERE THE TRUTH MIGHT LIE, BUT I DID KNOW THAT IN SOME COUNTRIES WHERE SUCH A PROBLEM HAS EXISTED GOVERNMENTS HAVE FOUND IT USEFUL TO DECLARE GENERAL OR PARTIAL AMNESTIES, SOMETIMES IN CONNECTION WITH CHRISTMAS OR THE NEW YEAR.

6. PRESIDENT ROMERO DISCLAIMED KNOWLEDGE OF ANY POLITICAL PRISONERS. HE SAID THAT WHEN HE ASSUMED THE PRESIDENCY, HE ASKED THE HEADS OF THE SECURITY SERVICES IF THEY WERE HOLDING ANY POLITICAL PRISONERS. THEY ANSWERED NEGATIVELY. AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, HIS OWN CONSCIENCE WAS CLEAR. THE VISITING GROUP FROM THE IAHRG COULD TAKE ANY STEPS TO LOOK INTO THIS

PROBLEM: IT WOULD BE FREE TO GO WHERE IT MIGHT WISH,
INTERVIEW PERSONS OF ITS CHOOSING, AND VISIT ANY
INSTITUTIONS IT MIGHT CONSIDER APPROPRIATE. THE
PRESIDENT SOUNDED SINCERE.

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